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UNCLAS ROME 001024

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR OES/IHA AND IO

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: ITALY RESPONSE TO WHA SMALLPOX DEMARCHE

REF: STATE 050724 (NOTAL)

1. On March 31, per instructions in reftel, Rome delivered talking points to Dr. Vittorio Silano, Head of the Ministry of Health's Department of Innovation. On April 4, we received a reply from Dr. Maria Grazia Pompa, Head of Office V (Infectious Diseases and International Prevention) of the MOH's Department for Prevention. Dr. Pompa explained that no one from Rome would attend the April 5 negotiation in Geneva. However, the GOI intended to send a note to the World Health Organization (WHO) conveying the GOI's position on the destruction date for smallpox viral stocks.

2. According to the note, shared informally with us, the GOI is in favor of delaying the destruction date for smallpox virus stocks for the following reasons:

- Because of the need for DNA research on the virus to develop antiviral pharmaceuticals;
- In order to study more effective purified second- and third-generation viruses using hybrid molecular methods;
- In order to develop more secure vaccines with fewer side effects for certain categories of at-risk patients (immuno-compromised patients, especially those affected by AIDS); and
- In order to perform comparative genetic studies to counter the eventual emergence and spread of vaccinal virus infections in animal hosts in Africa.

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